

Manga

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The Citi Exhibition Manga, edited by Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere and Matsuba Ryoko, exhibition catalogue, London, The British Museum, 23 May–26 August 2019, London, Thames & Hudson in collaboration with the British Museum, 2019, 352 pp., 318 ill., £29.95.

Museums outside Japan have increasingly addressed manga since the 2000s, and recently even Hokusai exhibitions and their publications foreground 'manga', that is, the *Hokusai Manga*, of 1814–78, but rarely has manga in the contemporary sense of graphic narratives taken centre stage as extensively and spectacularly as with *The Citi Exhibition Manga* of 2019.¹ Like the show, the catalogue highlights manga as reading material produced in close collaboration with editors at publishing houses, distributed through paper-based magazines and paperback book editions, and tied to fan communities and cross-media franchises. The main focus is the type of manga that was dominant in Japan between the 1960s and the 2000s. Not covered are the recent challenges posed by digital platforms, nor art-historical considerations of the broader definition of 'manga', which can be seen as stretching from satirical drawings to sequential art, including but not limited to modern print media.

In addition to the Introduction and an overview by the exhibition's chief curator, Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, the book provides short essays by two groups of authors: historians of Japanese art like Timothy Clark, Matsuba Ryōko, Sadamura Koto and Ishigami Aki, and well-known representatives of manga and anime studies such as Itō Gō, Ryan Holmberg, Adam L. Kern, Rayna Denison and Thomas Lamarre.² A notable exception is the contribution by the historian of European graphic novels, Hugo Frey, which illuminates how 'less mainstream Japanese work' – short graphic narratives by Sugiura Shigeru and Tsuge Yoshiharu, among others – has captivated the attention of alternative comics artists in North America since the late 1980s.³ Most stimulating for researchers involved in the academic field of manga studies is probably the essay by Lamarre, a specialist in media studies, who demonstrates how at about the same

time, manga in Japan 'becomes more like a platform', offering multiple medial points of entry into narratives that are serialized in magazines, republished in book volumes, adapted to video games and animations and subjected to derivative fan creations.⁴

Coolidge Rousmaniere's chapter 'A Manga for Everyone' emphasizes diversity – primarily in relation to thematic categories that purportedly evince the existence of 'hundreds of genres' such as Adventure, Transformation, Love and Desire, Faith and Belief.⁵ Readers of the catalogue who have witnessed the European reception of manga since the 1980s might miss a critical consideration of those 'graphic' representations that made manga infamous with regard to physical violence, for example, in brawls and battles, or naked bodies involved in various sexual acts, up to and including the genre of *eromanga* (or *hentai*, as it is known abroad).⁶ 'Sexual Expression in Printed Form' is considered in Ishigami's essay and featured in some illustrations. Manga loans for exhibitions are not easy to come by, and a project of this scale poses even greater problems. In this regard, the curators' accomplishments cannot be estimated highly enough, even if the ultimate selection of artists and narratives appears less diverse than promised, for example, from the perspective of Japan-based genre discourse which has privileged age and gender with categories like *shōnen* (boys) manga and *shōjo* (girls) manga. The book features mostly narratives targeted at adult readers, ranging from alternative works to mainstream series that fall into the genre categories either of *josei* (women), or *seinen* (youth) manga (fig. 335). Initially oriented at young male adults, the *seinen* manga magazines have come to include work by female artists such as Nakamura Hikaru (b. 1984), Yamazaki Mari (b. 1967) and Kouno Fumiyo (b. 1968) whose work can be encountered in the book.

As distinct from the British Museum's *Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art, 1600–1900*, of 2013, in which some of the art-historical contributors to the manga book were involved, this book does not rest on academically groundbreaking research.⁷ Institutionalized in Japan over the

1. *Hokusai*, edited by S. Nagata, Berlin, 2011; S. Nagata, *Hokusai*, Paris, 2014; and *Hokusai x Manga*, edited by S. Schulze et al., Munich, 2016, see K. Ito, 'Hokusai and Manga: Japanese Pop Culture since 1680', *Print Quarterly*, no. 4, 2017, pp. 444–47.

2. As in the book under review, here the indication of Japanese names follows Japanese custom, that is, surname preceding first name without separation by comma.

3. Coolidge Rousmaniere and Matsuba, op. cit., p. 306.

4. Coolidge Rousmaniere and Matsuba, op. cit., p. 154.

5. Ibid., p. 20.

6. See K. Nagayama, *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*, translated by P. Galbraith and J. Bauwens-Sugimoto, Amsterdam, 2020.

course of the last two decades, manga studies is not as established a field as art history and as such not as deliberately considered across disciplines despite a growing body of scholarly publications. One indicator is the use of 'manga' in English. In contemporary Japanese the word manga may signify both comics in general and Japanese comics in particular. In the narrower sense of the word, labelling the illustrated newspaper *Eshinbun Nipponchi*, which came into existence in 1874, as 'the first satirical manga magazine made by Japanese' can be regarded a retrojection, as the contemporaneous term was not manga but *ponchi-e*, in other words 'Punch pictures' – a reference to the nineteenth-century British satirical magazine *Punch*.⁸ The historical contingency of the term manga is demonstrated in Matsuba's essay with regard to Hokusai and his time, but also Japan's first modern manga master, Kitazawa Rakuten (1876–1955), who started to apply the term to his cartoons in 1902. The broader sense of the word manga in Japanese, namely, comics in general, is unnoticedly reflected in the English translation of Itō's essay, where the possibly earliest example of European comics, the graphic literature (*littérature en estampes*) created by Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846), is called 'manga', while panels, or frames (*koma*), feature as 'cartoon cells'.⁹ Instances like these suggest that the book under review privileges novices to the field of reading, and studying, Japanese comics: 'It is hoped that visitors to this exhibition and readers of this catalogue will gain a new and readily deployable skill: they will become fluent in manga.'¹⁰

Although equipped with an exhibition checklist, the exhibits are neither systematically reproduced nor consistently credited in the book, which makes it difficult to use it in the same vein as, for example, the *Shunga* catalogue. Some of the historical artefacts displayed in the exhibition zones 'The Art of Manga' and 'Drawing on the Past', such as a fragment of the medieval *Frolicking Animals* scrolls copied by Kitazawa Rakuten, do not appear in the publication. For researchers such evidence is important, as it helps to trace cartoonists' actual reception of artworks that have been purported as the 'origins' of modern manga in popular discourse. There are also a few inaccuracies: a double-page spread by Akatsuka Fujio (1935–2008) is said to have been published 'in an extra edition of *Weekly Shōnen Jump* on 1 August 1965', except that this magazine launched only three years later; and Morohoshi Daijirō's 24-page story *Red Flower*, first published in 1979 in the magazine *Big Comic*, is indicated only with the year of the earliest book edition, 1993.¹¹

The ground on which to compare past and present is

critically considered by all contributors with a background in Japanese literature or art history. Kern, for example, refers to serial formats, recurring characters and adult readership when he claims that in Japan 'comics' matured centuries earlier than in the West.¹² His essay appears in Part 2 of the book, 'The Power of Storytelling', while Matsuba's discussion of Hokusai's manga is allotted to Part 5, 'Motion Through Line', together with Sadamura's description of one of the exhibition's historic centrepieces, Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–89)'s *Shintomiza Kabuki Theatre Curtain*, of 1880, which does not directly relate to manga as printed graphic narratives. Clark's focus on the 'power of the line' in graphic art across ages commences Part 4 'Manga and Society'.

All the essays are richly illustrated with images ranging from preparatory brush drawings made not for manga but for *ukiyo-e* prints to contemporary manga pages. In the pre-digital age, artists crafted the panelled pages and inserted the dialogue by pencil and, before printing, the editors glued typed script onto those parts. With digitization, however, the 'original pages' no longer carry letters and as such, traces of the artist's or editor's hand (fig. 335). Consequently the illustrations span manga artists' hand-drawn and hand-lettered intermediaries from the pre-print stage, non-lettered printouts of digitally finished panelled pages and, furthermore, magazine covers. In addition, the book features fifteen interviews with creators and mediators. Yet its true value lies in the fifteen 'manga extracts' that occupy almost half of it. Not all of these are printed in continuous sequences, but those that are provide an actual experience of reading manga, aided by English translations in the page margins. This experience is potentially rewarding in diverse ways, be it as a first encounter with the manga medium or a discovery of older, more experimental and yet untranslated works. Among them are a three-page 'gag manga' by Akatsuka, of 1973, featuring the artist's signature sound words, self-invented and rendered in bold handwriting; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, created in 1980 by Ōtomo Katsuhiro (b. 1954), where panels shrink in size proportional to their multiplied number; and – likewise exploiting the fixed space of the printed page – *The Willow Tree*, of 2007, by Hagio Moto (b. 1949), a short piece which excels in almost wordless storytelling: only three out of twenty pages carry dialogue in this narrative of a dead mother who is watching over her son throughout his life until he finally becomes aware of her presence.¹³ These manga works appear in the book untranslated, and unflipped – that is, the pages have

7. Reviewed by M. Wattles, *Print Quarterly*, xxxi, 2014, pp. 470–73.

8. Coolidge Rousmaniere and Ryoko, op. cit., p. 291.

9. Ibid., p. 325.

10. Ibid., p. 10.

11. Ibid., pp. 102 and 216.

12. Ibid., p. 104.

13. Hagio's *The Willow Tree* was first published in the women's manga magazine *Flowers* in May 2007.



335. Noda Satoru, *The Ainu Heroine Asirpa with her Companion, the White Wolf Retar, Attacking Shiraishi Yoshitake and, in the Background, the Protagonist Saichi Sugimoto on his Quest for the Legendary Treasure*, from *Golden Kamuy* (2014 onwards), digitally made drawing (© Noda Satoru / SHUEISHA).

not been adjusted to a left-to-right reading direction. Thus, both their script and panel composition require the reader to proceed in the Japanese manner from right to left. Accordingly, the book provides guidance like 'please start on p. 141 and work back to p. 123', and numerical instruction in which order to scan the individual panels on each page. Special credit goes to

the inclusion of seventeen pages from Kouno Fumiyo's *Giga Town: A Catalogue of Manga Symbols*, first serialized in the non-manga journal *Issatsu no hon* in 2017. Its vertical four-panel strips exemplify one traditional mark at a time, subtly facilitating what the book as a whole seems to promote: 'to read manga once is better than hearing it explained a hundred times'.